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ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-57656>

Journal Article

Published Version

Originally published at:

Parish, L C; Geiges, M L (2011). The wax model. *Skinmed*, 9(5):275-277.

EDITORIAL

The Wax Model

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With the advent of PowerPoint presentations and digital photography, the slide, sometimes referred to as a Kodachrome or diapositive, has been relegated to the attic or, even worse, the recycling bin. Glass projection transparencies have long since disappeared from department collections, with a few water-colored illustrations clinging on in an occasional clinic as a reminder of the past; yet, one vehicle survives, even with its rocky history, the wax model.¹

The wax model, sometimes referred to as a moulage, provides a wonderful three-dimensional view of skin disease. The coloring can be so realistic that the model is almost life-like.* While significant collections remain extant at institutions such as l'Hôpital St Louis in Paris,² "Andreas Sygros" Hospital in Athens,³ and the University of Zurich,⁴ other collections of yesteryear are nowhere to be found or have been markedly reduced in numbers and prominences.⁵

A REBIRTH

Dermatologists and historians have begun to rediscover the almost-forgotten three-dimensional models of the skin.⁶ Many

have been molded from patients with the use of a plaster cast to provide unique exhibits of skin diseases, often of yesteryear. In some cases, the patient histories have also survived to provide a window into earlier times.⁷

In the early 1960s, Kodachromes had replaced the moulages at Zurich as teaching aids, but then an exhibition in the Museum of Medical History in Zurich changed the course of wax model history.⁸ The exhibit drew new attention to the nearly forgotten medical wax figures. By 1993, the growing public interest finally led to the opening of the modern Museum of Wax Moulages of the University Hospital and the University of Zurich.

A CURRENT EDUCATIONAL TOOL

After showing several special exhibitions on historical topics, the Museum of Wax Moulages in Zurich now provides a complete tour for the specialty of dermatology and venereology (Figure 2, Figure 3). This is based on the Swiss catalogue of learning objectives for undergraduate medical training. Despite the objections of some who view new as good and old as bad, this, being the oldest of dermatologic teaching aids, has proven to be of great

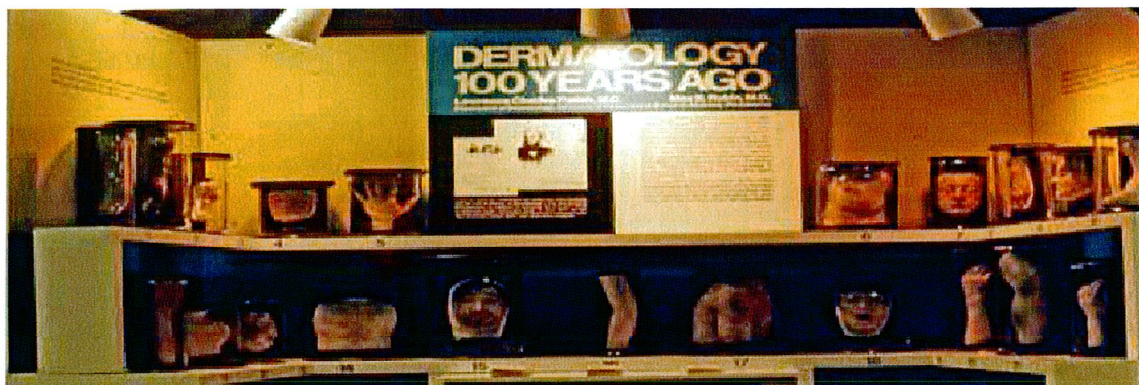


Figure 1. An exhibit of the Collection of Wax Models of the University of Pennsylvania at the 30th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology, Chicago, IL, December 4–9, 1971.

*When the Dühring models were exhibited at the American Academy of Dermatology Meeting in 1971, the porters were afraid to approach the booth for fear of contracting the diseases depicted¹⁰ (Figure 1).

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Figure 2. Wax moulages being made at the University of Zurich: A) how the moulage is casted and B) the painting process. Copyright Tine Edel (tine.edel@freesurf.ch).

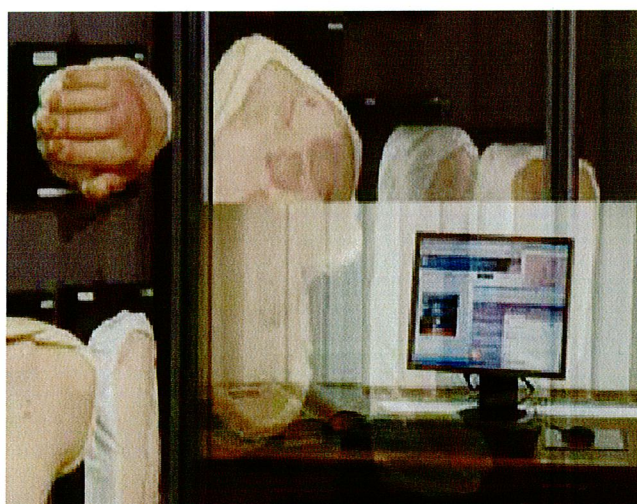


Figure 3. An exhibit at the University of Zurich.

value for the medical students.⁴ The collection complements the teaching of skin diseases, providing a more realistic approach, along with e-learning and digital imagery.⁹

For more than 5 years, the introduction to dermatologic training has taken place in the museum itself and has been met with great success. These wax moulages have regained their position as important teaching aids, thanks to their outstanding quality and quantity, with there being more than 1800 models in the collection (600 on display). Pictures of some of these models are currently published in many issues of *SKINmed*.

THE FUTURE

We recognize that not all dermatology programs have or will have wax models; however, we believe that they are highly useful for teaching students and dermatologic neophytes (Figure 4). Where else can the morphology of various skin diseases be introduced so well?

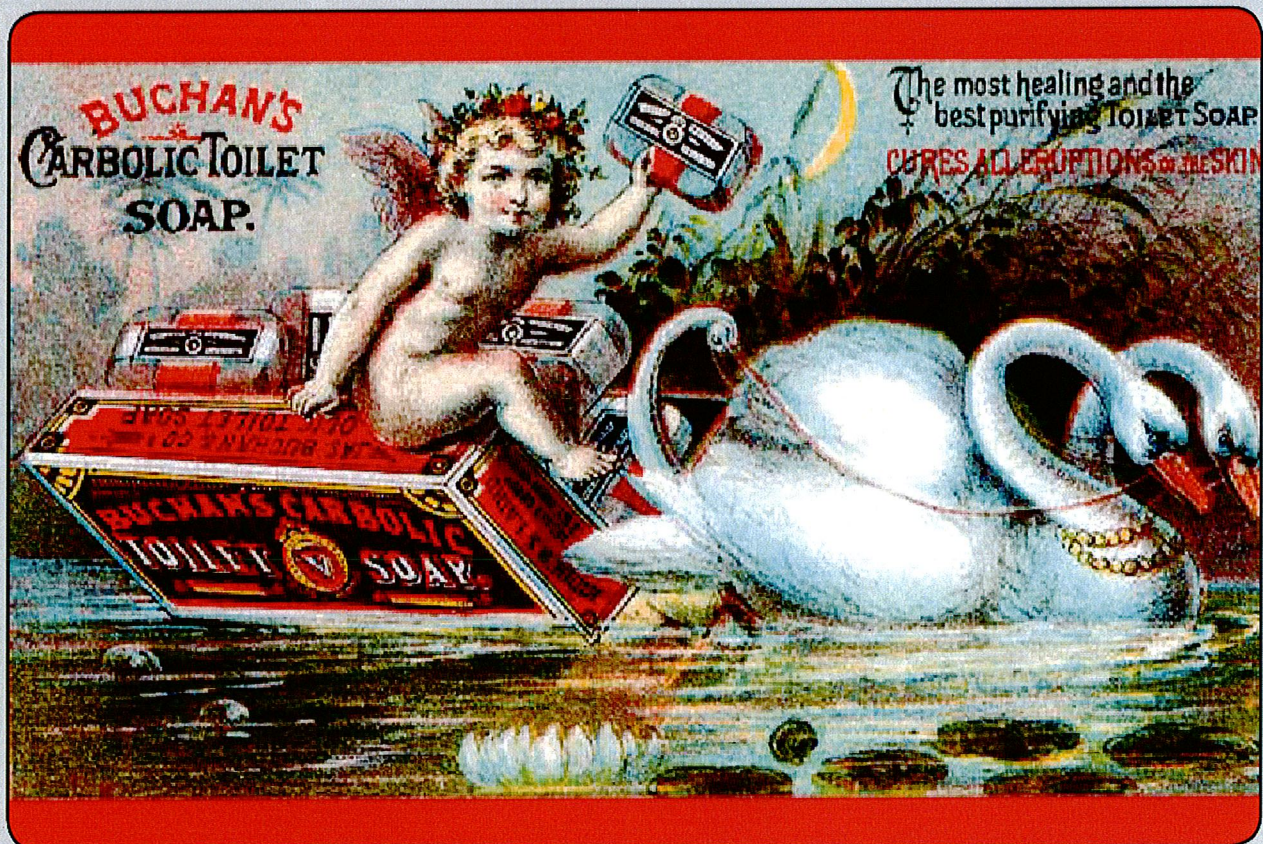


Figure 4. Wax models at the Mutter Museum of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

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